



# Ghadar Jari Hai

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**Eviction Raj**  
from British to the  
**Present**

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**Important note from the publisher:**

An endeavour like this can only run with generous contributions from readers and well wishers. All writers, artists, graphics and layout staff are contributing their products and services freely and voluntarily. However to barely recover the cost of printing and postage we have been forced to revise the contribution per issue. Many readers, who are aware of the likely financial burden of such a magazine, have suggested that we come up with a life time contribution scheme for patrons. Accordingly with this issue we have introduced such a scheme. The details are given below.

We are confident our readers and well wishers will help us make this effort a success.

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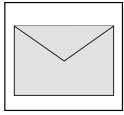
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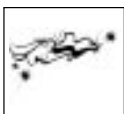
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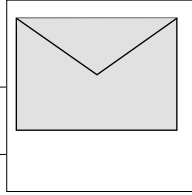
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## Letters to the Editor

To the editor,

Thank you for bringing out such a sober and serious magazine. It is a piece of work that would be welcomed by all people who are interested in progressive Indian thought as well as international progressive thought. The views expressed are not parochial and well researched.

I was recently asked to speak in a meeting at Bombay University to celebrate International Human Rights Day and I extensively used excerpts from the articles in the last issue of Ghadar Jari Hai on 'When will India's Tryst with Destiny be?' by Prakash Rao and the article on constitutional changes carried out by the British that helped in creating the present Indian political system, by Kamala Sankaran.

This effort needs global publicity and access by international readers and I volunteer to help in creating a web portal around "Ghadar Jari Hai".

**Rahul  
Thane, Maharashtra**

Dear Editor,

The second issue of GJH has been such a wonderful read. I enjoyed reading all the letters to the editor. It was heartening to know that everyone has received the magazine well. The leading article 'When will India's Tryst with Destiny be?' was excellent and in a simple direct manner exposed the apologetic nature of Nehru's speech after the transfer of power. The story of Nupi Lan tells us of the suffering of people in the North-East under the AFSPA. Overall, a tremendous amount of hard work and painstaking research has gone into the issue and it is seen in the excellent quality of the articles. It presents history not as some fossilised facts but brings out the common thread between the struggles of our ancestors and the problems of our people today. It is our past viewed not in black and white but in all its brave colours. We are eagerly awaiting the third issue.

**Nirmala Mathew  
New Bombay**

Dear Editor,

When I saw your magazine, I was surprised to find a review of Savarkar's book, because of his politics of Hindu Mahasabha. However, the review was very objective and dealt with his book on 1857 on its merits. I found out how true it was, when I later borrowed a copy of the book and read it myself. Congratulations on being faithful to your editorial policy of examining everything objectively and not being blinded by any label.

**Regards  
Syed Amin  
Mumbai**

Dear Editor,

Your article on Nupilan in Manipur was very helpful. I think people in the rest of India do not know how the Indian government and its armed forces are treating the people of North-East. It is no wonder that they look upon this government as a colonial government. I hope you publish more articles about the history of North East so that more and more people are educated about it. India can be a great country only when it is a voluntary union and its constituents are treated with equality and respect.

**Regards  
Satya Prakash  
Lucknow**

Dear Editor,

I welcome your magazine and was especially very happy to read the interviews in the last two issues under Peepul ke Neeche. They have been informal but very informative. Amaresh Misra has shed new light on many aspects of 1857 and I look forward to reading his book when it is published.

**Regards  
S Srinivasan  
Chennai**



# Editorial

**W**e bring you the third issue of Ghadar Jari Hai. We apologise for a month's delay.

Prof Raghavendra Rao, one of our editorial advisors, commented after seeing the first two issues "you have done an excellent job, however it would be hard to maintain this quality in future issues." We are obliged to him for his encouragement and words of caution and we have strived to maintain the quality.

We have seen increasing opposition to forced eviction of peasants from their lands in the name of industrialization, urbanisation and SEZs - be it Kalinga Nagar, Raigad, Nandigram or Singur. This issue's cover story, written by Kannan Kasturi, traces the evolution of this phenomenon of eviction and land acquisition by the state under various pretexts starting with colonial India.

S Raghavan has gone a step further and traced the traumatic changes that British brought into land relations and ownership. Madhavi Thampi has reminded us of a defining moment of 20th century viz., the October Revolution and its significance today. In this issue, instead of a book review, we have carried the summary of an important book authored by C K Raju on Indian calculus and the cultural foundations of mathematics. Peepul ke Neeche features a conversation with Mahmood Farooqui, a distinguished researcher into 1857. He has given us a vivid micro-picture of what happened in Delhi during the Great Ghadar.

As a document, we have carried excerpts from the Minute by Macaulay on educating Indians, which gives

a glimpse of the colonial administration, which assiduously turned most of us into "Macaulay's Children".

As usual, many people have contributed news items for Resonances to give us a whiff of happenings around the country.

Many readers including prominent creative writers have complimented us for carrying short stories and not just serious essays. However, we need more contributors to this section.

We welcome Prof S. Settar of National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, Prof Sreedhara from Bengaluru, Dr Shamshersingh Bisht from Almora, Panju Ganguli from Mumbai, Dr Zahid Hasan Mahmood and Mehboob Rehman from Dhaka University, Bangladesh on joining this Ghadari caravan as editorial advisors.

Last but not the least is the very important point of financial support for this venture.

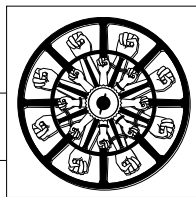
In these times when the printed media has become the handmaiden of advertisers and their moneyed patrons, it is an uphill task for magazines such as this to find their space. Discerning and truth seeking readers like you have become crucial to the survival of value-based journalism of any kind.

This year has been very exciting for all of us involved in this adventure in journalism and here is wishing on behalf of the entire Ghadar Jari Hai team a healthy and productive 2008. ■

## Happy New Year 2008



People's protests against forced land acquisition and eviction



Cover Story

# Land Acquisition from Colonial Times to the Present

**The way a state handles land acquisition reveals a lot about the nature of the state and its relationship with its citizens, says Kannan Kasturi.**

**States use the power of Eminent Domain to justify laws to forcibly take control of any land if it is needed for some "public good". Land is intimately related with livelihood. Land acquisition by the state – for whatever purpose of necessity, affects individuals and entire communities. The way a state handles land acquisition reveals a lot about the nature of the state and its relationship with its citizens.**

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are being lauded as the newest “engines for economic growth”. After the SEZ Act was hurriedly passed by parliament in 2005, the government has been on overdrive putting administrative procedures in place and handholding a host of private developers through the process of SEZ approval. Newspapers regularly carry the government provided ‘score card’ of the number of SEZs approved together with the planned investments, the potential employment and the projected exports they will bring – news that is expected to enthruse the middle classes with visions of an imminent speedup of economic activity and attendant benefits.

While government extends a host of concessions under the umbrella of the SEZ to private industry with the plea that this will lead to increased economic growth, the matter does not end with this. SEZs have a territorial component – they must be constituted on a demarcated contiguous area of land that can be fenced off and treated as a “foreign territory”. Further, the land area for the proposed “multi-product” SEZs – locating enterprises with a mix of different products/services – must be at least 10 sq km and may be as large as 100 sq km. How are such large contiguous areas of land to be obtained? This is where the State governments are expected

to play a major part in the current scheme of things.

The current activity by state governments in relation to several of the largest proposed SEZs is illustrative. The West Bengal government has not been deterred by the failure of its land acquisition programme in Nandigram; it is looking at alternative areas as well as land for the Haldia SEZ. The Maharashtra government is actively acquiring on behalf of Reliance for the Maha-Mumbai SEZ while it has transferred lands already acquired by CIDCO to the Navi-Mumbai SEZ. And near Delhi, there is the example of the Reliance Haryana SEZ where the state government and Reliance together have signed an agreement for developing what is billed as the largest SEZ in India within a stone’s throw from Delhi with the expectation that this will eventually get approval from the central government. Acquiring the land by using the coercive land acquisition laws at their command is indeed the biggest incentive held out to the private SEZ developers by the state governments.

## **The Power of Eminent Domain**

The current ‘campaign’ to establish Special Economic Zones has thus once again brought into focus the Land Acquisition law. The Land Acquisition law represents an in-

stance of the power of Eminent Domain claimed by modern states the power to take any private property for public use. This power is justified by maxims such as “regard for public welfare is the highest law” and “public necessity is greater than private necessity”. To understand this law and all its features, we must turn to our colonial past.

The origins of the land acquisition law can be traced to the East India Company era regulation, The Bengal Regulation I of 1824 that enabled land to be acquired for roads, canals and other ‘public purposes’. With the development of the railway network, railways were declared to be public works in 1850 so that land could be acquired for them. Separate laws that had evolved in the territories around Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were consolidated into a single law applicable to all the territories of British India in 1857. Land could be acquired by the colonial administration for ‘public purposes’ and the compensation to the land owner was fixed by the collector. In case of a dispute on the compensation amount, the recourse was to an arbitrator appointed by the administration.

#### **A role for the judiciary**

In 1870, the colonial state took steps to dress up what was earlier called the ‘Indian Expropriation Act’ as the ‘Land Acquisition Act’. Rules for determination of compensation for the acquired land based on ‘market value’ were defined, a ‘solatium’ (additional compensation over market value in view of the involuntary nature of parting with the land) introduced, and the right of appeal to civil court in case of dispute over compensation provided. By this time, the judiciary had evolved

**The end of colonial rule in 1947 and the republican constitution of 1950 did not bring about any change in the land acquisition law. The Constitution of India, by article 372, allowed all colonial laws to remain in force unless they were explicitly repealed – and this applied to the land acquisition law as well.**

as the second pillar of the colonial state and was accorded a role as an arbitrator between the state and the person(s) losing land, but only in respect of compensation – the right of the state to take the land was not itself contestable. The law continued to be fine tuned over a period of time under British rule and took the consolidated form of the ‘Land Acquisition Act 1894’ – and this law (with some amendments) remained in place through the colonial period.

The key concerns of the colonial law makers were eminently clear. The state had to be able to acquire land for any purpose quickly; compensation payouts, seen as a drain on the government resources, were to be minimised; the acquisition had to be seen to be ‘lawful’ and not arbitrary and the authority of the state to acquire land was to be absolute. The law was framed with exactly the above concerns in view. While

acquisition was always made under the guise of “public purpose”, what constituted “public purpose” was neither defined nor limited by the law; it was sufficient for the state to declare it to be so. Thus land acquisition for enterprises operating railways and mines or even manufacturing salt – though privately owned – qualified as being for ‘public purposes’. Elaborate rules were framed for determining compensation and ensuring that ‘excessive’ payouts did not happen. This was the genesis of the draconian land acquisition law.

An insidious aspect of the colonial law was that it recognised rights only with respect to individual land ownership. All land not individually owned was considered to belong to the state. Traditional community oriented rights of villagers over common lands were not recognised and hence not compensated. Also, as was only to be expected, the colonial state took no responsibility for compensating people who did not own land but whose livelihood depended on it, such as agricultural workers and others who serviced the farmers. Compensation of the land owner was deemed to have served the requirements of justice. Loss of livelihood of the landowner or others dependent on the land consequent to a forced land acquisition was not the state’s concern.

#### **Republican Constitution and colonial law**

The end of colonial rule in 1947 and the Republican Constitution of 1950 did not bring about any change (leaving aside verbal changes such as using the words “all the provinces of India” for the words “the whole of British India”) in the land acquisition law. The Constitution of India,



by article 372, allowed all colonial laws to remain in force unless they were explicitly repealed – and this applied to the land acquisition law as well. The Law Commission appointed by the Government of India reviewed the land acquisition act in 1956. A large number of suggestions were received by the commission urging that the term ‘public purpose’ should be clearly defined by the act. However, the commission chose the safe alternative and recommended in its 10th report in 1958 that it is ‘neither possible nor expedient to attempt an exhaustive definition of public purposes’ and that all that can be attempted is to ‘provide an inclusive definition so as to endow it with sufficient elasticity to enable the courts to interpret the meaning of the expression ‘public purpose’ according to the needs of the situation’. The state clearly felt quite comfortable with the colonial law.

### **The human cost of the ‘temples of modern India’**

Starting with the fifties, there was an enormous increase in infrastructure building and industrial activities by the state. Numerous large dams, power plants, mines, steel and heavy engineering plants came up over land acquired using the colonial law, causing a massive displacement of small farmers, agricultural labour, landless village workers and artisans and forest dwellers. Various social scientists estimate the number of people displaced by big projects in 50 years since 1947 at over 50 million! The national leaders and policy makers viewed the displacement to be the legitimate and inevitable cost of development and acceptable in the ‘larger national interest’.

Compensation followed the requirements of the colonial land law and was available to only those who could show ownership of land and then too based on ‘market value’ rather than to cover the cost of replacement. Rehabilitation, inadequate in the best of cases, was mostly absent – the law did not mandate it. Often, forced relocation was carried out without even settlement of compensation claims. In the case of the Hirakud Dam for example, it was reported that only one-third of compensation claims had been disbursed, when in March 1956 people were forcibly displaced. In the absence of any rehabilitation plan, people occupied whatever open lands they could locate. These lands are still not legally theirs, and they live under constant harassment by forest officials.

Even while the people were asked to sacrifice, the administration exploited the unbridled powers available to them. Social Scientist, Walter Fernandes cites a few instances:

**Jawaharlal Nehru, while laying the foundation-stone for India’s first major river valley project, the Hirakud Dam in Orissa in 1948, said to the tens of thousands facing the grim prospect of displacement ‘If you have to suffer, you should do so in the interest of the country’**

“two thirds of the land acquired for the HAL-MIG Plant at Sunabeda, Orissa, in 1966, lay vacant for three decades and was later sold at a high profit. But the 3,000 tribal families it displaced have not been resettled. Much of the land acquired on both sides of the Roro Irrigation Canals in Jharkhand for ‘public purpose’ was given to relatives of the officials to build housing cooperatives. The Burla township has come up on excess land acquired for Hirakud.”

### **‘Public purpose’ and private profit**

Public sector and government projects were not the only purposes for which land was forcibly acquired by the state. Even in the Nehruvian period, land was being acquired for private industry by state governments. A landmark judgement (R.L. Aurora vs. State of U.P, 1962) of the Supreme Court held that the government could not justify acquiring land for a textile machinery manufacturer as a ‘public purpose’. It further declared that “the land acquisition act did not contemplate that the government should be made a general agent for companies to acquire lands for them for their private profit”. The immediate response of the government was to amend the law through the Land Acquisition (Amendment) Act 1962 to allow land to be acquired for a company “which is engaged in or is taking steps for engaging in any industry or work for a public purpose”. With this amendment, the Nehruvian era state, quite definitive about preserving its power of acquiring land for private industry, superseded the Supreme Court judgement. Subsequently, in the courts, a variety of projects of private enterprise for diverse purposes – houses for members of a co-operative society, manufacture

of alumina bricks, construction of a students home, an electrochemical factory, a sugar factory – were all held to promote ‘public purpose’, and the land acquisition by the state for these enterprises upheld. Another amendment to the land law in 1984 widened the inclusive definition of ‘public purpose’ to include acquisition of land for ‘planned development’ and subsequent sale to private enterprise (in other words, for state industrial development corporations and the like).

Governments used their powers under the law in unabashedly authoritarian ways. Some examples are illustrative: the West Bengal Government acquired level fertile agricultural land in West Medinipur for Tata Metaliks in 1992, which dispossessed small and marginal farmers, in preference to undulating wasteland that was available nearby. In the case of the Century Textiles Pig Iron Plant in the same area, the state government acquired land for a proposed plant in 1996. However, till 2003 the factory had not come up and neither had all the original land owners been fully compensated; the company had decided that pig iron production was no longer profitable because of availability of cheaper Chinese output and refused to pay the compensation and take over the land. The Tamil Nadu Government was not above using emergency powers (available under the Land Acquisition Act) to get land from villagers near Pulicat Lake for developing a chemical industrial complex consisting of sites for private units.

### **Liberalisation and land for industry**

However, governments have not been content with even this power as they consider the land acquisi-

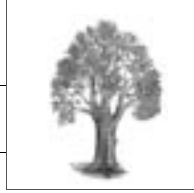
tion process to be time consuming and cumbersome and a roadblock to quick industrialisation. Tamil Nadu came out with legislation, the Tamil Nadu Land Acquisition for Industrial Purposes Act, 1997 – especially aimed at speeding up land acquisition for industrial estates and parks. The central government too, for its part, proposed a Land Acquisition (amendment) Bill, 1998 to look at ways of speeding up the acquisition process for land for industries. This bill was never placed before Parliament and allowed to lapse after meeting with strong opposition from peoples’ organisations and social scientists. The first draft of a national rehabilitation policy was put out in 1993; the draft stated that this was done in view of the new economic policy, and the expected rise in the demand for more land and hence displacement ! The rehabilitation policy has since then been upgraded several times – the latest being the National Policy on Rehabilitation and Resettlement, 2007 that has just been approved by the government but without ever having been given any teeth in law.

The latest attempt by the Indian state to amend the land law to assist in the creation of SEZs is the Land Acquisition (amendment) Bill, 2007. Indian Express reported on Oct 11th 2007 that the UPA government approved the bill and described its highlights thus: “Keeping in view the land required for private industrial projects, in addition to land required for strategic and public infrastructure purposes, the amendment to land acquisition rules will suitably define public purpose, allowing state governments to acquire land for persons, which includes a private company, association or a body of individuals, provided it is “useful to the general pub-

lic” ( for example, employment generation) but will be restricted to cases where at least 70 per cent of land has already been purchased by developers. This means that the government can acquire a maximum of 30 per cent of land for private industries to facilitate project development in cases of hold-outs by a few.” True to the style of government, this amendment was never made public for discussion. The reason for that too is obvious.

The Indian state of the 21st century – a state that never tires of proclaiming itself to be the world’s largest democracy – continues to see its rural citizens with the eyes of the British colonial power of the 19th century. Land acquisitions continue to be made invoking the power of eminent domain in the name of “public purpose”, dispossessing large numbers of the public of their land and means of livelihood, displacing and disrupting entire communities. Compensation to the land owner does not reflect the real value of the land – it is never sufficient to buy equivalent area of land nearby even if such land were available. Rights of landless labourers, share croppers, village artisans, fishermen, salt workers and others who are also affected by the acquisition are not recognised. Loss of habitat and natural resources – commons used for grazing, forests yielding minor products, water bodies – are not compensated. And the law till date has no provisions for rehabilitation of the individual leave alone the community. Is it any wonder that the people of Nandigram, Singur, Kalinganagar, Paradeep refuse to accept the power of eminent domain of this state? ■

***The author, Kannan Kasturi is a physicist and a software engineer who writes on governance, law and public policy.***



Peepul Ke Neeche

## Delhi: 1857

**We present a freewheeling discussion between Mahmood Farooqui and Shivanand, regarding Delhi around 1857. Mahmood is a historian, who has extensively studied archival material in Urdu regarding 1857 and particularly about the uprising in Delhi. He is currently writing a book on Delhi in 1857. He has also studied the vanished performing art of 'Dastaangoi'. He has tried to revive the form by putting up a series of performances as well.**

**Shivanand:** Let us start with some basic information about Delhi of those days, like population, geographical extent, political and cultural life.

**Mahmood Farooqui:** By 1857 Delhi's population was about a lakh of people and it was surrounded by the outer walls of the city built by Shahjahan, that is Shajahanabad, with 12 gates - Ajmeri gate, Kabuli gate, Lahori gate, Kashmiri gate etc. Delhi had many cities before like Mehrauli, Kilokari, Tughlakabad etc. A few new settlements had come up outside Paharganj thana, Subji Mandi also near Mehrauli, near Nizamuddin, a settlement near Badarpur etc.

The city was almost equally divided between Hindus and Muslims with some Jains. The court was a centre for certain kind of culture, for production of Urdu poetry, and music. The city had its own autonomous existence not revolving around the court. The king was fondly looked upon. A lot of Urdu poets congregated around him since he himself was one, but it was not as if he commanded the city's culture and people had mushairas in houses.

From 1830-35 there was the experiment of Delhi College which taught European science in Indian language (Urdu), English was a subject they studied. Master Ramachand was a great mathematician of Delhi College who later converted to Christianity. Zakaullah, Sir Syed studied there and so on. There was a rise of a new kind of intellectual in Delhi. In Calcutta also it happened, but in Delhi it was different, because here they were supremely confident of their cultural self. Acquiring new knowledge but confident of what they had already. There was an intellectual efflorescence based on enquiry. Among Muslims there was religious activity based on followers of Shah Waliullah in Madarsa Rahimiya. The English called them Wahabis. However there were no Wahabis in India who were with Abdul Wahab of Saudi Arabia. These were not Wahabis but Waliullahis, who were engaged in resurgence and rebuilding and contesting English claims. Some of them like Syed Ahmed Shahid, Shah Ismail and so on, actually went out to fight a jihad against the English and only against the English not against Sikh rulers

or Hindus or anyone else. Rahimiya madarsa was also a new kind of institution because it used print to propagate its views, to debate with English missionaries, to convert and so on.

**Was it just a theological seminary or were there other branches of knowledge like medicine, mathematics?**

Standard madarsa then was based on a watered down Aristotelian system: works of logic based on Greek philosophy, and mathematics. It was not just theology it depended also a lot on the teachers. It was not standardised and it could vary. So and so might be very good in Arabic theory or Persian prose so people went to study under him. It was like a gurukul, centred around the reputation of the guru. This was the intellectual ferment in the city.

The city had a lot of Muslim Punjabi merchants who had interest in the religious debate that was going on. There were also a lot of Khatri in the city and of course the English presence was there; the magistracy, the courts and the settlement in civil lines, which was coming up

and the English were very much at home among the elite society of Delhi. That is why Ghalib had so many English friends and there were Englishmen writing in Urdu. This essentially was Delhi on the eve of 1857.

**How was the administration organised? Was it a mixture of British and Mughal ?**

I have tried to investigate it but a lot of administrative records of the time are not available in the national archives. For example, I could not ascertain who the police were reporting to? Judiciary was English but with the cooperation of Indians they were using mixed laws. Criminal law was Islamic and civil was mixed. The postal system was under British control. There was revenue collection from principalities around Delhi by the English. There were seven of them in Pataudi, Dujana, Ballabgarh, Bahadurgarh, Jhajjar and two more. The wider hinterland was governed by tehsildars appointed by the English. The king, Bahadurshah Zafar was a pensioner and had revenues from some villages and rent from some shops in the city.

To give a little background, in 1761 Shah Alam the Mughal prince who was living outside of Delhi (Delhi was in anarchy), fought along with Nawab Shujaudaulah of Awadh, the Battle of Buxar against the English and lost it. So he and Shujaudaulah had to cede some rights to the English. After mandering for sometime in Allahabad he came to Delhi. He began to live under the protection of Mahadji Scindia, who was then controlling Delhi, around 1780. Then in 1803 British marched westwards and defeated the Marathas in the battle of Patparganj and the Mughal king

**The Mughal princes were very popular with the army. They would not be so unless they were very much active against the English. Mirza Mughal was made the Commander In Chief at the insistence of the army. He was very influential.**

came under the protection of English. The king became a pensioner of the English with increasing interference from the English in his rights and privileges. He died in 1837 and Bahadurshah then became the king. By then the English were even trying to interfere with the protocol and who will succeed. Clearly, Bahadurshah knew that he probably would be the last in Mughal lineage.

**It is said frequently that Zafar was a reluctant leader and it was thrust upon him. At the same time the firman issued by Zafar on 12th May displays a lot of sagacity and well thought out statecraft. So what was his role and that of other members of his family?**

There was a great deal of commotion in the city on the day that the soldiers arrived from Meerut. Meanwhile some soldiers reached Bahadurshah and told him 'come lead us we will win the entire Hindustan for you'.

His chief advisor, his hakim, was very reluctant and remained sceptical right through. He said, "these soldiers have turned against their masters, do not depend on them". However, the king did not commit to anything. The soldiers were hungry. They did not speak with one voice. Some were even disrespecting. Some pulled his beard and said 'ye buddhe, come and fight'. They looked down upon royalty. They felt the royalty are useless people, where as soldiers were fighting for the country.

However, what he did the next day is very intriguing. He wrote a letter to all the Rajputana princes to come and help him fight. He would not have done so unless he was sure that these soldiers were going to stick around. If he were taken by surprise, he would wait and see. There is something there, which I have not figured out.

However, the princes were very popular with the army. That tells us something. They would not be so unless they were very much active against the English. Mirza Mughal was made the Commander in Chief at the insistence of the army. He was very influential. There were two or three other princes who were also active. Firoz Shah had gone to Haj and when he came back, he went directly to Awadh and fought. He was not Bahadurshah's son.

**What was the 'court of mutineers'?**

It was formed sometime in early July. I saw a document, which says Court of Administration qayam kiya jaata hai. Then it goes on to explain its composition and constitution (dastavez): two members from cavalry, infantry and artillery and four civilians with the Commander in Chief acting as the president; voting by

majority; in case of disputes the matter to be referred to the king. If the king disagrees with the court about any matter then it will be discussed again in the court and if they do not change and decide to stick by their decision then it would be binding on the king and so on. They dealt with administration, finance, everything. Similar courts were formed in Lucknow, Kanpur and even Jhansi. Soldiers insisted on this and even though we only remember the royal leaders, everywhere they were circumscribed by these courts of soldiers. They often mistrusted the old rulers. They did not want the old to dominate. They clearly wanted a consultative role, a republican concept of governance.

Most orders are coming from CIC, but even the CIC is questioned, e.g. there is a note from the accountant to the CIC that how is the expenditure on the elephant used by CIC to be accounted for. He says the court will not accept it as a military expenditure. Then the CIC says do not put that in the account. I will speak to the members of the court and then see who should pay. This is a month later. So obviously the court was very important and hovering behind every order of CIC. For example there is a letter from a spy, which says, 'the soldier's court met and they denounced the officers and said these guys do not want to fight, they are pilfering our money and promoting their favourites. Today we are dismissing all of them and taking over and so on.'

### **What was the role of Bakht Khan?**

Before Bakht Khan's arrival with the Bareilly contingent, every new group of soldiers that arrived went to the Ridge first, fought with



A view of Delhi in 1857

great valour and then came to the city and settled down. In between there is bhang and courtesans and so on. When Bakht Khan came in early July, he introduced a great amount of vigour. He superseded Mirza Mughal and he was appointed the Lord Governor by the King, since Bahadurshah trusted him. He was close to Moulvi Sarfaraz Ali who was the leader of Mujahideens (they came for jihad against the English and other volunteers). Bakht Khan organised proper battles by turns, he also organised salary distribution, tax collection and so on. But there was rivalry between him and Mirza Mughal. In about a month he started losing steam. There was no unified command; soldiers were loyal to their own regiment. There was also a lot of rivalry between the Bareilly and Neemuch contingents. Bakht Khan decided to go and attack the English from behind and cut off the supplies from Punjab. It was an obvious thing to do, but no one had thought of it. However, in the battle he refused to help the Neemuch

brigade led by Sidhara Singh and Hira Singh for which he was reprimanded by the King. But Bakht Khan said I am not anybody's nautkar to go and help anybody.

There was no proper hinterland for supplies. There was shortage of sulphur, of vegetables, of atta and almost everything else. The thanedars were then asked to organise supplies and they managed to do so. Over all what is significant is not that they lost but they held out for four months under these circumstances!

**What would you consider as the major cause of defeat at Delhi? Also supposedly Bakht Khan asked Zafar to leave Delhi with the soldiers but Zafar refused to do so. Why was that?**

You have to see it from Bahadurshah's point of view. What he saw was infighting and indiscipline. They were not fighting under unified command. A number of times he said "I am leaving Delhi I am going to the shrine in Mehrauli, I will go for Haj, I will commit suicide" and so on. He was trying to use many

stratagems to bring them under control. Bakht Khan was brave and a great strategist but had failed to bring Delhi under unified command. He also did not go and help Hira Singh and Sidhara Singh at a critical point. The situation worsened. Soldiers were coming into deewan-e-khas with shoes on, sometimes with their horses and arms. This had not happened even in the times of Nadir Shah or even English.

Therefore, he had many reasons to be unhappy with the soldiers. Zafar fighting from Delhi was potent but Zafar fighting from elsewhere would not matter much. He knew that the dynasty is over. He did not expect to be spared by the British.

#### **What role did religion play in Delhi during 1857?**

There was an enormous amount of religious rhetoric. The firmans and the press kept saying 'protect deen-dharam'. They were openly inciting people against the English

using religion. There is nothing wrong with that. I do not know how Prof Irfan Habib says that religion did not play a role in 1857. They were creating a constituency for war in people's mind. Not that religion was very important to these soldiers, after all they were using the same cartridges which are supposed to be coated with animal fat. Second thing is the appeal for Hindu-Muslim unity. This was the first time that Indians themselves created two categories of Hindus and Muslims. 'India is where both Hindus and Muslims live'. This is not self evident. It was created in 1857. The whole secular nationalism still talks about unity of Hindus and Muslims. Why don't they talk of India as a land of taluqdars and peasants or of five rivers? The people did not see themselves as Hindus and Muslims but 1857 made them think so. These are not descriptive categories but constitutive categories.

It made everybody into Hindus

and Muslims. We should question this construct. While we laud 1857, we should note that it essentialised us as Hindus and Muslims. There are all kinds of ways India can be seen.

After 1857, we started fighting Europe on its terms. During 1857, we fought Europe on our own philosophical and epistemological grounds.

#### **Can you comment on the need to study 1857 today?**

There was widespread resentment against the British and hence there was support for the Ghadar even among those who did not take up arms or contribute monies. That is why we should not study 1857 in terms of victory and defeat but in terms of sentiments. We have only asked nationalistic questions in studying 1857. Do we study 1857 for Indian bravery, for military strategy, for nationalism? If we do, we would be disappointed. We will only see English triumphalism. Not all patriotic struggles need be nationalistic struggles. We need to ask more intelligent questions. The soldiers became radical. Why did this not proceed further? Why are there no accounts of julahas (weavers) of Allahabad fighting. What was Kunwar Singh inspired by, what was Tatya Tope inspired by and so on. There should be monographs on Kanpur, on Lucknow or even Deccan and so on. Let us depict what actually happened.

**Shivanand: Mahmood, your book on Delhi would be looked forward to and I hope there will be more such empirical studies instead of tepid and simplistic accounts. Thank you. ■**



The historic 300-year old Anglo Arabic School in old Delhi



## Events

# Resonances

### Meet to unite divided people of the subcontinent

Agra, a city known for its friendly atmosphere and ever hospitable people, was witness to another gesture and a serious attempt on part of the people of this subcontinent, now divided into three different countries, to come together to end the legacy of division and animosity fostered by the rulers of these countries.

The Bangladesh-Bharat-Pakistan Peoples Forum (BBPPF) organised a public meeting on August 9 in which students, teachers, political activists, communists, intellectuals participated with the firm resolve to end the division.

Shri Brij Khandelwal coordinated the proceedings. He pointed out that many people from across the border, from Pakistan and Bangladesh, were to join this meeting, but were denied visa by the Government of India.

Shri Ramkishore, Convener of the BBPPF, narrated the initiative taken up by the forum in the context of facilitating building unity of people across the borders. In his speech he said that civilisation and imperialism cannot co-exist and imperialism has to end.

Speakers pointed out that this division should be seen against the backdrop of the great unity that was displayed by Indians across the entire sub-continent during the Great Ghadar of 1857 and the freedom struggle. Partition of this subcontinent is part of the colonial legacy

and the strategy of the imperialists to keep the people of this subcontinent divided and at loggerheads with each other, so that they do not unitedly challenge the imperialists.

Leaders of the Communist Ghadar Party of India, Nationalist Congress Party and Jamaat-e-Ulema Hind addressed the meeting. Amongst others who spoke were Dr John Dayal, Member, National Integration Council; Dr Mittal and C.P. Rao. Dr Tejeshwar Prasad, Former Director, Institute of Social Science, Agra, presided over the meeting.

### Did 1947 fulfill the unfulfilled dreams of 1857?

"The transfer of power in 1947 was a betrayal of the aspirations of our people for sovereignty, for political power to shape our own destiny ..."

This was the conclusion that emerged from the varied presentations by writers, teachers, social activists, lawyers, journalists, women activists, student and youth activists on August 12, 2007. They were participating in a discussion organized by Lok Raj Sangathan on the theme "Did 1947 fulfill the unfulfilled dreams of 1857?"

The convener of Lok Raj Sangathan elaborated on how in the course of 1857 Ghadar, as well as in the numerous other struggles, the question of establishing people's power has been posed. In August 1947, power did not get vested in the people of India.

The Constitution of India does not acknowledge the existence of nations and people and their rights. Instead it sanctions the use of military power against the people who want to affirm their national rights. It does not guarantee human rights including the right to conscience. The political system and process ensure that power does not vest in the people. People are not satisfied with a political process which does not allow them to decide their own destiny. The system of representative democracy, in which political parties rule in the name of the people and prevent people from coming to power, is not acceptable. People do not want trustees to rule on their behalf. They want to rule themselves. These were some of the substantive points that emerged in the presentations in the meeting.

Jasvir Singh of the CGPI called for replacing the present Indian Republic by a workers and peasants republic and a voluntary Indian Union. Dr Kamala Sankaran of the Indian Law Institute addressed the colonial legacy in the political institutions of our country, the theories of "representative government" and "responsible government". She pointed out that laws such as the Arms Act, the Societies Registration Act, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, the Press Act which the British colonial rulers passed to crush the struggles of our people after 1857, still continue to be used against any form of popular dissent.

Vrinda Grover scathingly exposed the current 'campaign for police reforms' being promoted by the Home Ministry. Prof Nandini Sundar showed how the British colonisers had systematically deprived the tribals and other forest dwellers of their rights and the present Indian state continues to do the same. Noted advocate Prashant Bhushan pointed out that the present day judiciary is in many ways a continuation of the colonial judiciary which was used to legitimize the rule of the British Crown. He called for taking the struggle for direct democracy forward.

Kenneth, co-convenor of the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, dwelt on the struggles of the Naga people for independence from the British colonizers. He condemned the gross violation of human rights using the colonial AFSPA and other methods and declared that the struggle of the Naga people for their rights will continue. Malem called 1947 a deception and treachery. He highlighted the struggle of the Manipuri people against colonialism as well as the struggle today against the colonial legacy. Luntinsat Kingpen highlighted the struggle of the Kuki people in defence of their land and liberty, from colonial times till today.

Siddharth Varadarajan pointed out that whether it is a question of upholding the right to conscience, or the question of where power must vest, or the question of the unity of the Indian people irrespective of religious or caste differences, or the question of ownership of natural resources, the present Indian state is a continuation of the colonial state and not what the Ghadaris of 1857 envisioned. Prof Jagpal Singh put forward new thoughts on reforms in

the electoral process in order to empower people.

Santosh Kumar of the Hind Naujawan Ekta Sabha called on people to get rid of the Eurocentrist thinking that has been imposed on us by the colonisers. Lokesh Kumar of the Sanjay Colony Niwasi Sangharsh Samiti raised the urgent need for people to fight to secure the right to hold the legislators accountable and to recall them when they betray the people.

Young workers from the Honda Factory Workers' Union in Gurgaon enthralled the audience with a stirring rendition of their experiences, in the form of a short play.

Amongst others who participated in the meeting were Prof Rizwan Kaiser, Jamia Milia Islamia, Ram Kishore of Bangladesh Bharat Pakistan Peoples Forum, writer Shivanand, Renu of the Purogami Mahila Sangathan, Dr K.S. Subramanian, Dr N.K. Afandi of the Jamaat Islami e Hind, Dr J.K. Jain, Com Thaneshwar of NCWR, B.B. Tiwari of UNI Joint Action Committee, Dr Rakesh Rafiq of Yuva Bharat, Narendra of Indian Federation of Trade Unions, Mohd Anwar of the Jamaat Ulema e Hind. Sucharita and Bijju Nayak chaired the meeting.

### **Public meeting on "The Transfer of Power in 1947"**

On August 15, 2007, a public meeting was organised in Mumbai to mark the 60th anniversary of formal independence and to discuss who gained and who lost in 1947. Lok Raj Sangathan and the Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh Smruti Samiti jointly organised the meeting.

Girish from Lok Raj Sangathan pointed out that innumerable rebellions in all parts of India had con-

vinced the British that it was no longer possible to rule over India by force of arms alone. They handed over power to the classes who had prospered in the colonial regime and who were found to be worthy of British trust in safeguarding their interests. Thus, the transfer of power in 1947, accompanied by the partition and communal bloodbath, preserved the colonial institutions and structure built for exploitation of human and natural wealth of India. The experience of the past 60 years bears out this truth.

A teacher pointed out that the presentation establishes that the Indian people have a brilliant history of fighting against exploitation and oppression, that there have been two streams in Indian history, one which compromised with the colonialists and the other that uncompromisingly opposed the colonialists.

Activists of many organisations Aagaz, Kamgar Ekta Chhalwal, Indian Airport Employees Union, Kashtakari Yuvak Sanghathana, Nakshatra, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Parivartan Sanskrutik Manch, Prerna Sanghathana, RADA, Samvaad, Vimantal Parisar Rahiwasi Ekta Sangh participated actively in the meeting.

### **The struggle against the colonial Legacy**

On Saturday, August 25 2007, the Students' Union of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai organised a seminar on the topic "Settling Scores with Eurocentrism". On 26th August, a workshop was organised by Lok Raj Sangathan, Ulhasnagar on the same theme. Leaders of the Lok Raj Sangathan, Dr Sanjeevani and Dr Bharat were the main speakers on both occasions.



The presentations dealt with the situation that existed in pre-British India and highlighted the achievements of the people of this subcontinent. They convincingly brought out that India was a rich country, with a flourishing agriculture, technology and industry advanced for those times, as well as a developed health and education system. In every region of this vast subcontinent, progressive socio-cultural movements had taken root. From time immemorial it was accepted that the raja was duty bound to look after the well-being and security of the praja.

All this received a mortal blow during the British rule. The British not only ruined the native agriculture and industry but also committed genocide of whole people who challenged their oppressive rule. Among other things, they also carried out cultural genocide, destroying precisely those things from our past that are necessary for the well being and prosperity of our people.

The second presentation dealt with the issue of imposition of Eurocentrism. This outlook regards Europe and the Western world as the origin and source of everything worthwhile in human civilisation – be it philosophy, science, technology, culture or economic and political institutions and systems. This outlook was instilled and propagated by the British colonisers because it was essential for justifying their rule over our India and other colonies. If it could be established that people of this subcontinent were uncivilised, as if they had no achievements in the fields of science, philosophy or economic and political theory, then their rule could be justified as “white men’s burden”.

The colonisers imposed Eurocentrism to enslave the minds of the

people. In 1947 they handed over power to a class that was imbued with Eurocentric ideas.

In the workshop in Ulhasnagar, there was an expose of the Indian National Congress by Prahlad. Using many quotations from Congress records, he showed how the Indian National Congress was set up by the British colonialists as a mechanism to defuse the anger of the masses and divert them from a revolutionary path. A paper on the Ghadar Party was presented by Subodh.

Why do the present day rulers continue the British tradition of hiding and distorting history? There was lively discussion on this question.

### Meeting in Southall, London

On 30th September 2007, Indian Workers Association (Great Britain) organised a public meeting in London’s Southall Community Centre to commemorate the birth centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh. The Indian Workers Association was established by Shaheed Udham Singh during colonial times to organise Indian workers in Britain against racist and capitalist exploitation in Britain, as well as in support of the freedom struggle of Indian people.

Speakers pointed out that Shaheed Bhagat Singh became a role model for all people of all religions regardless of caste or creed to organise themselves and to take action to transform India. The meeting hailed him as “...a model for youth and working people all over South Asia...to take action and fulfil his vision”.

Dalwinder chaired the meeting. He spoke on the life and work of Bhagat Singh and his vision for an India which is ever relevant today. He elaborated on the necessity for work-

ers, women and youth of South Asian origin in Britain to organise themselves for their rights, in unity with the British working class. He pointed out that the Indians who had made Britain their home have the responsibility to support the struggle of the working class and peasantry of India for the revolutionary transformation of Indian society so that all forms of exploitation are ended in India.

Raj, a young worker organising the working class youth, pointed out that South Asian youth in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, have grown up in the richest countries of the world. The news tells us India is rapidly developing, but do we want an India which merely copies the US or UK only offering what we already have today? Or do we want something far greater as was envisaged by Bhagat Singh? The struggle is on in India to establish a system and society of which we Indians living abroad can be immensely proud. At this historic opportunity, the youth must adopt the vision of Bhagat Singh and take action today and become the role models of tomorrow as is Bhagat Singh the role model for youth today.

Prakash Rao of Communist Ghadar Party of India pointed out that in the whole of South Asia, there is tremendous unity in holding high the legacy represented by Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. This was because these young men stood for the highest ideals of mankind. They drew inspiration from the revolutionaries of 1857, from the Ghadar revolutionaries, from the Great October Socialist Revolution, and all the positive achievements of the world’s people. Shaheed Bhagat Singh wanted to not only get rid of colonialism, but together with it, the very system of exploitation of persons by persons.

The capitalist system of plunder that colonialism imposed on India, as well as the representative democracy which was imposed by the same colonialists to legitimise this plunder must both be overthrown for India to progress.

Further on, Comrade Rao spoke of the widespread and organised nature of the 1857 Ghadar, and the massive genocide of those patriots by the British imperialists. He spoke of the cultural genocide carried out consciously by the colonialists, as a result of which Indians, especially amongst the intelligentsia, are ingrained with the thinking that all knowledge and wisdom, science and technology, emanates from the West. He emphasised the need to break the shackles of this colonisation of the mind. He called for developing a system by which the workers and peasants will have power in their own hands. It is when they have power in their hands that they will be able to solve all the problems confronting the society today.

Salvinder mentioned how British imperialists have tried to make us forget about our proud, patriotic history, languages and culture. He called upon the community to build worker's organisations loyal to the cause of working people. The meeting was also addressed by a speaker from the Pakistani community, as well as a militant woman leader of the Gate Gourmet workers.

The audience enthusiastically appreciated the political speeches, messages of solidarity, plays, poetry, patriotic songs, Bhagat Singh Giddhas and Bhangra dances.

### **Meeting in Gravesend, United Kingdom**

On October 7, 2007, the Kent Branch of Indian Workers Associa-

tion (Great Britain) commemorated the centenary of the birth of the great patriot and martyr Shaheed Bhagat Singh. The meeting was held in the sports complex of the new Gurdwara that is being constructed by the community in Gravesend.

Amar Jagpalpuri, President of the IWA (Great Britain) Kent Branch, chaired the meeting, along with Professor Jagmohan and Prakash Rao. Dara Singh compered the meeting.

The hall was beautifully decorated with pictures of the martyrs. On the stage, the young activists of the IWA (GB) projected key messages of Bhagat Singh bringing out the essence of the struggle he and his comrades waged. By highlighting these statements of the Shaheed, the organisers of the meeting made sure that all the participants in the meeting, speakers as well as those listening, focused on the lessons that need to be drawn for carrying the struggle that the Indian people are waging today against capitalism and the colonial legacy to victory.

Shri Jagpalpuri rendered a patriotic poem in Punjabi. Dalwinder spoke on the struggle waged by Bhagat Singh and his comrades, particularly in jail and in the courts, to expose the system of colonial rule, to expose the compromisers, and to rouse the masses of Indian people in revolutionary struggle against the colonisers. He emphasised that the transfer of power in 1947 constituted a treachery and the Indian people remain an exploited and oppressed people, even as India is marching on the road to become a world class imperialist power. The Ghadar continues against this treachery, he declared.

Lekhraj spoke about the struggle of Bhagat Singh and its relevance.

Prof Jagmohan then delivered a stirring speech on the life and work of Shaheed Bhagat Singh. He recalled the role of women in the struggle, such as Durga bhabhi who used to risk her all for the cause of the revolution.

Prakash Rao pointed out that the Shaheed and his comrades in arms worked with the lofty vision of putting an end to all forms of exploitation of persons by persons. There was not an ounce of pettiness, narrow mindedness, in them, and the deep love for humanity was evident in the way they waged the struggle. They learnt from the positive experience of the Great Ghadar of 1857, and of the Ghadar revolutionaries of the early twentieth century and the fire of revolution burnt in their hearts. It is extremely important that we revolutionaries have the broad vision, that we concentrate the fire on the Indian big bourgeoisie and imperialism, and unite all the revolutionary forces in the struggle.

The meeting in Gravesend clearly showed how Indian workers and youth, living and working in UK, are actively thinking and working to bring about those changes in India which will finally put an end to the colonial legacy.

### **Ghadari Mela 2007 in Toronto, Canada**

On October 21, 2007, the Ghadar Heritage Foundation organised the Ghadari Mela 2007 in Toronto, Canada. Over 500 people participated in this event dedicated to the 100th birth anniversary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the 150th anniversary of the great Ghadar of 1857.

Iqbal spoke about the significance of the martyrdom of Shaheed Bhagat Singh. Prof Wariam Sandhu paid his tribute to Shaheed Bhagat

Singh and eloquently brought forth the point that the ideal for which the martyrs gave their lives remain unfulfilled. He denounced the present system for the problems people face today.

Gurdev spoke about the significance of the Ghadar of 1857 and the struggles of the Indian people for their liberation. He pointed out that the situation in India cannot be changed without the forcible overthrow of the existing conditions.

Comrade Amolak Singh, the representative of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, Jalandhar, expressed his happiness at being part of the celebration. To vigorous applause, he announced that 70,000 revolutionary youth of Punjab had gathered in the centenary celebrations organised in Barnala on September 28, 2007. On the other hand, the official function organised at Amritsar in which lakhs of rupees was spent, and the Akalis, Congress, as well as BJP participated, could not attract more than a few thousand people. He said that those who first hanged Bhagat Singh and then hanged his thinking are now ruling India. People cannot expect such rulers to create the kind of society Bhagat Singh stood for.

Patriotic songs and poems paying tribute to the martyrs of the Ghadar of 1857, and Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his comrades, were sung by prominent singers from the community. Children from the Gurukul Academy acted out a choreographed drama showing how Mother India is crying in the hands of the thief, the present day rulers. A play called "Hum Dekhenge" depicted the situation in Pakistan, showing who was responsible for the misery of the people and how the people should organise revolution to change that

situation. Another play depicted the struggle Shaheed Mewa Singh and earlier generations of Indians had to wage in North America. The entire function was confirmation that the Ghadar continues in the hearts and minds of the South Asian community in Canada.

### **Ghadari Mela in Jalandhar**

The 16th annual Ghadari Mela concluded in Jalandhar on an enthusiastic note on November 2, 2007. This annual mela, organised by Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Committee was started 15 years ago to commemorate the sacrifices of our great martyrs, and to inspire the youth of today to complete the unfinished task of liberating our people from all kinds of exploitation and oppression. Every year thousands of revolutionary and progressive workers, peasants, women and youth from

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progressives groups from  
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participating in the mela.**

Punjab and other parts of country participate in the annual gathering. In the past few years a number of progressives groups from Pakistan have also been participating in the mela. Like previous years, this year also many publishers of progressive literature set up their stalls which attracted youth in large numbers.

This year the mela coincided with the birth centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and 150th anniversary of the great Ghadar of 1857. To commemorate the sacrifice of great patriot Baba Vasakha Singh the venue was rechristened as Baba Vasakha Singh Nagar. The entire campus was dotted by flags of Hindoostani Ghadar Party and banners extolling the people of the country to overthrow the existing system which is based on exploitation and oppression of people and to establish the rule of workers and peasants.

On November 1st, the Mela reached a crescendo when the entire committee of trustees of the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Committee gathered on the stage and youth, workers, peasants and women gathered in thousands to participate in the ceremony of flag hoisting. Following the flag hoisting ceremony, comrade Mangat Ram Paasla addressed the gathering on behalf of the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Committee and called upon people to intensify their struggle against capitalism and imperialism. He declared that Ghadar Jari Hai, aur Jari Rahega ( the revolt against exploitation and oppression is continuing and will continue in the future as well) until the aspiration of our martyrs of 1857 and freedom struggle like Shaheed Bhagat Singh are fulfilled.

Baba Bhagat Singh Bilga, the head of the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar trust, who turned 100 this year,

called upon the youth to organise to overthrow the capitalist system. General Secretary of the trust Baba Gadharva Singh Kochar called upon all communist revolutionaries to unite and fight against the capitalist system.

There was a grand cultural programme, in which cultural troops from Punjab and various parts of the country participated and presented revolutionary and inspiring songs and plays. A team of artists from Pakistan staged a play on social harmony. The mela concluded on 2 November and the entire parisar was reverberating with slogans of "Inquilaab Zindabad-Long live revolution". "Samrajyavaad Murdabaad-Down with Imperialism", "Ghadar Jari hai The revolt continues".

Thousands of youth and children from various schools and colleges participated in various cultural and literary activities including drawing and painting, plays, songs, essay and writing competitions.

### **PC Joshi Birth Centenary in Almora**

On November 3, 2007, intellectuals, political activists, journalists and artists of Kumaon gathered in Savoy Hotel of Almora to celebrate the birth centenary of P C Joshi and Shahid Bhagat Singh. The event was sponsored by Infinity Foundation, Bhritpalji and Pannalalji Nyas and Pahar.

The seminar started with a session on P C Joshi and his contribution to the people's movement and particularly his contribution to Uttarakhand, his birth place. Prof Bhat welcomed the gathering and Prof Girija Pande of Kumaon University conducted the meeting.

The speakers included Alok Nath Upreti of Indian People's Theatre

Association, Vishwambharnath Sah 'Sakha' - a folk lore expert, Adv Chandrashekhar Joshi, Navin 'Banjara' Verma and Shamshersingh Bisht of Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini. They brought out different aspects of P C Joshi's personality through different anecdotes and also elaborated on the history of the people's struggle in the hill areas.

This session was followed by a presentation on the ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh by Prof Irfan S Habib of NISTADS. Prof Habib who has done extensive research on Bhagat Singh's life and work spoke about various facets of Bhagat Singh's life and work.

This was followed by a third session devoted to 1857. Shivanand presented an audio visual presentation prepared by Lok Awaz Publishers lasting over two hours. It covered in detail colonialism in India from 1700s leading to continuous revolts and resistance culminating in the Great Ghadar of 1857. The second part of the presentation dealt with the changes that came into being in British colonialism after 1857 and the third part with the transfer of power in 1947 and after. The detailed presentation was greatly appreciated by the audience and there was enthusiastic discussion and plans were made to have more such meetings in Kumaon on the subject of 1857 to educate youth and activists.

### **Ghadar caravan goes to Bengaluru**

On November 29, students and faculty of the well known Christ College in Bengaluru, organised a meeting on the Great Ghadar of 1857. The main speaker was Shivanand, on behalf of Ghadar

Jari Hai magazine. Over 150 students from the social science faculty keenly participated in the two hour long presentation prepared by Lok Awaz Publishers and asked penetrating questions.

"If Bahadur Shah Zafar said in 1857 that people of India would decide the future and in earlier anti-colonial struggles like the Shimagoga peasant struggle (1830) and the Santhal struggle (1855) people had raised republican slogans like peasant raj and garibon ka raj, then India had a long tradition of democratic sentiment", commented a student. There were similar perceptive remarks and questions from many others.

Shivanand gave a call to students at the end of the discussion to take up social sciences seriously and engage in hard empirical research that would unravel our own history and traditions. He lamented the fact that the colonialists not only left us the edifice of an anti-people state but also an outlook that is clouded by Euro-centrism. "Such a prejudiced view which looks down upon everything Indian and looks to Europe for all enlightenment has to be rejected. It is a pity that 60 years after independence we still have to rediscover India and glorious chapters in our history like the Ghadar of 1857 and Bhakti movement have not been researched enough", he added. He said he was glad that in the midst of all the hype and attraction of IT in Bengaluru, so many students were serious about pursuing social sciences. The meeting was chaired by Prof P Krishnaswami, Dean of Social Sciences and the speaker was introduced by Dr Vageshwari, Head Department of History, Christ College. ■



Perspectives

# The Colonial Legacy in Land Ownership and Relations

**What were the patterns in land ownership and land relations before the British rule and what far-reaching changes did they introduce, thereby destabilising the entire Indian society and economy, examines S Raghavan.**

**T**he land question has become even more acute today with the Indian state officially sanctioning the land grab by monopolies and corporate houses to set up their SEZs. The struggle of the peasants in Singur, Raigarh, Navi Mumbai and other places against this robbery is reminiscent of the struggle of peasants against taxation and alienation from land before 1857, in the era of the East India Company, and after 1857, when India came under the direct rule of the British Crown.

## The pre-colonial period

For centuries before the British colonial conquest, the traditional Indian village society was characterised by common ownership of land, the blending of agriculture and handicrafts and a certain division of labour. Within this broad characterisation, there seems to have existed different arrangements such as the periodic redistribution of the land by lot to groups of cultivators. It is somewhat simplistic to state that this cooperative life and the general absence of private property in village communities were mere survivals of the tribal system. The fact that huge

empires were built on the taxes collected from the produce of these villages and commodity production and internal and external trade in agriculture flourished, meant that the self-sufficient village society was efficient in production and organisation.

This fact has been substantiated by several studies. For example, according to the Centre for Policy Studies in Chennai, based on a study of palmleaf records at the Thanjavur Tamil University, "between 1762 and 1766 there were villages which produced up to 12 tons of paddy a hectare. This level of productivity can be obtained only in the best of the Green Revolution areas of the country, with the most advanced, expensive and often environmentally ruinous technologies. The annual availability of all food averaged five tons per household; the national average in India today is three-quarters ton. Whatever the ways of pre-British Indian society, they were definitely neither ineffective nor inefficient."

Agricultural taxation, before the British entered the scene, was based on the capacity of the producer to pay. According to various dharmashastras, such as the Manusmriti, tax amounted to about one-sixth of the agricultural produce in return for security against invaders and self-sufficiency. Differential taxation was adopted, such as in the Vijayanagar empire, to encourage production of certain agricultural commodities.

Rules governing use and ownership of forest land, grazing land and watersheds existed. Villages had bye-laws, which varied from region to region, to regulate the common use of pasture land and watersheds. These bye-laws ensured peaceful co-existence between communities.

Thus village communities maintained harmony with nature, constantly striving to humanise it for their benefit. Both the raja and the praja were bound by the dyad of rights and duties. The raja had the right to collect revenue from land as well as the duty to invest a part of the revenue in augmenting irrigation and water works. Peasants had the duty to pay taxes as well as the right to their livelihood.

Thus village communities maintained harmony with nature, constantly striving to humanise it for their benefit. Both the raja and the praja were bound by the dyad of rights and duties. The raja had the right to collect revenue from land as well as the duty to invest a part of the revenue in augmenting irrigation and water works. Peasants had the duty to pay taxes as well as the right to their livelihood.

## Colonial period (pre-1857 Ghadar)

During the colonial period, this dyad of rights and duties was violated brutally. Engineering a massive break with the past, the British put

an end to the common ownership of agricultural land through the Permanent Settlement of Bengal, concluded by the East India Company under Cornwallis in 1793. Earlier to this, the zamindars merely had the right to collect taxes on behalf of the Mughal Empire. The Permanent Settlement conferred ownership rights to these zamindars. The land revenue was set at a high unchangeable rate, so the zamindar had to be merciless in collecting taxes. Any defaults could lead to confiscation of their estates. The zamindari system was imposed on the area spanning Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and coastal Andhra. In the bulk of UP and upper Narmada Basin in M P and part of Haryana, a different system called the "Mahalwari" system was imposed, where revenue was levied collectively on smaller circles called mahals. The settlements were not permanent. The Ryotwari system was introduced in the Madras Presidency. In this system, land revenue was fixed permanently on each field, based on an estimate of the produce from the land. This prompted Marx to write, "If it is any nation's history, then it is the history of the English management of India which is a string of unsuccessful and really absurd (and in practice, infamous) experiments in economics. In Bengal, they created a caricature of English-landed property on a large scale; in the south-east India a caricature of small allotment of property; in the north-west, they transformed to the utmost of their ability the Indian commune with common ownership of the soil into a caricature of itself". These "experiments" caused immense havoc to the land system and the lives of the peasantry.

The British destroyed the tra-

ditional basis of Indian agriculture by introducing private property in land, in the place of common property. Sir John Strachey in his book, *India: Its Administration and Progress*, explains the necessity for the privatisation of land for the colonisers: "... Our policy has been to encourage the growth of private property in land... Former governments hardly recognised the existence of such property." He goes on to add, "It can be hardly doubted that their (peasants) indebtedness is greater now than it was before the establishment of our government because the right of private property in land has been virtually almost created by ourselves. When there was practically no such right, there was comparatively no credit; there was no adequate security that a landlord desirous of borrowing could offer, and there was therefore, less indebtedness." And finally, "If he (landlord) does not pay at the district treasury on the appointed date, no questions are asked... The estate is put to public auction." How matter of factly does Strachey explain the necessity for the colonisers to introduce private property in land in order to expand the land and credit market and justify the take-over of all land into the hands of the colonial state! Thus, all land was nationalised first and then partly privatised using the Permanent Settlement so that land revenue could be maximised as well as the plunder of natural resources could be intensified.

The use of land became unrestricted and the landlords forced their tenants to shift their cultivation from food crops to cash crops with disastrous results. The zamindars became absentee landlords negating the right of the tiller to land.

**For centuries before the British colonial conquest, the traditional Indian village society was characterized by common ownership of land, the blending of agriculture and handicrafts and a certain division of labour.**

Around this period, the zamindari system accounted for about 57 percent of agricultural land, and the Ryotwari system accounted for about 38 percent. The Mahalwari system accounted for the rest. Taxes were as high as 83 percent of gross revenue. In Punjab, where the mahalwari system prevailed, the taxes were about 50 percent.

Transfers of land were first institutionalized with the British land settlements. Legislation introduced in Ryotwari and Mahalwari areas during the 1850s enabled moneylenders to recover debts on loans secured on land holdings. Since revenue assessments were so high (particularly in Ryotwari areas), indebtedness grew, and dispossession of land led to rapidly rising tenancy. As a result, rural society in Ryotwari and Mahalwari areas was polarised into landlords and rich peasants versus tenants and agricultural labourers, and the distribution of land became highly unequal. It is estimated that by the time of formal independence, some 40 per cent of the total rural population of India were landless agricultural labourers.

Thus, the changes that the British brought on land ownership and land relations in India resulted in a traumatic change in the Indian way of life. Nothing of this sort had ever been attempted before. The relations of private property that the British introduced radically ruptured the very soul of rural India - it turned peasants into paupers, created unprecedented famines and indebtedness, changed land use drastically in favour of commercial crops and exporters, and upset the fine harmony between man and nature that earlier generations preserved and cherished.

### **Colonial period (post-1857 Ghadar)**

It can be seen that there were diverse agrarian structures in the period immediately after 1857. The thrust of colonial rule was to consolidate middlemen's claims into landlordship. The increase in commercialisation accelerated this process. So, a massive alienation of land from the cultivators followed. For example, it is estimated that "small proprietors" tilled 54 percent of cultivated land in 1891, but this reduced to 45 percent in 1900 - a decline of 16.7 percent in 10 years! The increase in landlordism was accompanied by an increase in rent in anticipation of land revenue by growing commercial crops.

It appears that a certain amount of restraint was exercised by the colonial rulers in the collection and raising of taxes on agriculture immediately after the Ghadar. Nevertheless, even in 1860-61, by far the biggest source of taxation was land revenue or land tax, which accounted for 43.1 percent of gross revenue.

Fuelled by exports and internal market demand, there was a shift from food to non-food crops. Area

under non-food crops increased from 13.42 percent of cropped area (excluding coffee and tea plantations) in 1875 to 15 percent in 1895. Within non-food crops, cotton and jute expanded most. It is estimated that over the years between 1891-1916, area under food grains grew by 0.31 percent annually, while area under non-food crops grew at a higher rate, viz., 0.42%.

While the construction of railways brought about rapid capitalist development in other areas of manufacturing, capitalist development in agriculture grew at a slow pace. The Indian peasant was not averse to using new machines and techniques, but just could not afford them. The only technological change visible was the sugarcane crushers, as documented by observers. A number of factors such as export of oil seeds, which served to enrich the soil earlier, expansion of cultivation in inferior lands, increasing use of cattle-dung as fuel affected the productivity of land.

The British planned the extension of canal irrigation through private capital with guaranteed rate of returns of five percent, but this proved a disaster in Madras and Orissa. It was a policy of the colonial government that canals should be "productive works" yielding a re-

turn of at least four percent - somewhat on the lines of "user charges" that the World Bank is advocating today. Canal-irrigated area did not exceed 6.5 percent of total area under cultivation in British India in the 1890s. Still canals irrigated a larger area than did wells. Canal irrigation was extensive in Punjab (including Haryana), Sind, western UP, and parts of Madras Presidency. Construction of canals affected the water table, created malarial swamps, and other eco disasters.

There are conflicting opinions whether the increase in gross cropped area kept pace with population increase. Indications are that between 1875-1895, the increase was just about the increase in population. Between 1891-1911, the increase in cropped area was higher than the increase in population. However, during the period of "deindustrialisation" between 1911-21 when the number of dependents of agriculture and pasturing increased by more than four million according to census data, cultivated land per person declined, leading to intensification of labour in agriculture, probably leading to more productivity.

After the Ghadar of 1857, the indebtedness of peasants increased to intolerable limits. A large number of peasants were deprived of their land by moneylenders and usurers due to rising interest rates. Indebtedness had assumed such astronomical proportions that in order to avoid a revolt by the masses of peasantry, the colonialists introduced the Punjab Land Alienation Act in 1900. This was supposedly to protect the peasants from alienation of land, but like all other legislation under colonial rule, the stated intent of the legislation was completely different

**All land was nationalised  
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from its actual purpose. Alienation of land from the peasantry increased even further.

To exploit India's huge forests, the Imperial Forest Department was created in 1864 under colonial rule. The first Forest Act was enacted in 1865 mainly to facilitate the acquisition of forest areas that could supply timber to the railways being built by the colonialists. The Act severely curtailed the rights of the forest dwellers and converted their right over forest produce to a privilege.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which still exists today, was passed by the colonial government to take over public and private land for "public" purposes such as the construction of highways and rail-

ways and paved the way for rapid growth of capitalism.

Prior to the colonial period, wastelands formed a part of the village commons, managed and utilised by the village communities along with other common property resources (CPRs). Wasteland as a category in the land revenue records in India has its roots in the colonial system of land classification, where any land not contributing to government revenue through crop cultivation was designated as wasteland. Till date, the callous approach of the state to this category of land is rooted in the very nomenclature, which not only disregards both economic and ecological contributions of these lands but also ignores the diversity of their potential and limitations,

which local communities know better than the state apparatus. By alienating the administration of this land from the village communities, the colonial authority brought about massive destruction and devastation in the agricultural economy and environment.

Thus, in 1947, a colonial legacy was left behind by the British colonisers, which haunts us even today – a parasitic agrarian structure, rent-seeking intermediaries, different land revenue and ownership systems across regions, a small number of land holders holding a large share of the land, a high density of tenant cultivators, many of whom had insecure tenancy, regressive legislation and exploitative production relations. ■



# Ghadar Jari Hai

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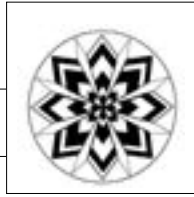
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Reflections

# The Defining Event of Our Times

**Madhavi Thampi recalls the context and impact of the October Revolution, which was derided by the western establishment as the uprising of the janitors and watchmen.**

**N**inety years ago, the world as we know it was turned upside down. This is evident from the bewilderment expressed in the words above by the tsarist General Zalessky following the revolution in Russia in November 1917. The janitor had become the Chief Justice, the worker had become the boss, the slave had become the master. This was unlike any political transition previously witnessed in history, in which one scheming adventurer had replaced another at the helm of affairs, or one exploiting class had nudged aside another only to carry on with the subjugation of the common people albeit in new forms. In Russia, the most downtrodden had, for the first time, arms in hand, assumed

control of their lives and embarked on a hitherto uncharted course. They were going to build a new world for themselves. And through their actions, they would show the immense potential of collective human labour to create prosperity, security and culture for all, when it is freed from the crushing restraints imposed on it by a system geared to ensuring the hegemony and profits of a few.

Despite the derisive comments made by its opponents in Russia and outside about this uprising of the janitors and watchmen and “yesterday’s lackeys”, the significance of the October Revolution was not lost on the kings and emperors of the old world, or even on the high-talking “democratic” states-

men of republican countries like the United States at that time. As soon as they had extricated themselves from the catastrophic World War into which they had plunged their countries and colonies, they lost no time in pooling their forces to try and snuff out this experiment. For they knew that, despite being located in faraway Russia, it threatened the foundations of their supremacy over the working people in their own countries. When they failed through military intervention, they continued the siege through long years of economic boycott and political and diplomatic isolation which they hoped would choke it to death. The new republic of workers, peasants and soldiers soviets, however, not only survived it all, but went on to create a powerful and altogether new type of society that set the standard for all countries and societies thereafter – be it in the field of education or medicine or science or the arts, or in the realm of industrial and agricultural growth, public welfare, democratic and national rights, or international relations.

Today, when it has become fashionable in some circles to dismiss the October Revolution as a slice of history with no relevance to the present day, or to even deny its achievements altogether, it is worthwhile remembering what eyewitnesses to the unfolding developments in the early decades of the Soviet Union

**“Who would believe that the janitor or watchman of the Court building would suddenly become Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals, or the hospital orderly manager of the hospital, the barber a big functionary, yesterday’s ensign [junior military officer] the commander-in-chief, yesterday’s lackey or common labourer burgomaster, yesterday’s train oiler chief of division or station superintendent, yesterday’s locksmith head of the factory?”—General Zalessky, a Czarist General.**

had to say about it. And there were indeed plenty of eyewitnesses, from every country around the globe, because the Soviet Union at that time was a magnet drawing to itself not just communists and socialists, but also revolutionaries and nationalists of every description, political refugees, artists, literary figures and other intellectuals, students, workers and just the plain curious. Rereading today what some of them wrote is revealing. Rabindranath Tagore, whose "Letters from Russia" were published after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1930, wrote: "In stepping on the soil of Russia, the first thing that caught my eye was that in education, at any rate, the peasant and the working classes have made such enormous progress in these few years that nothing comparable has happened even to our highest classes in the course of the last 150 years. The people here are not at all afraid of giving complete education even to Turcomans of distant Asia; on the contrary, they are utterly earnest about it."

The October Revolution redefined the concept of progress by including as its beneficiaries for the first time every last member of the society, including the toiler, the tiller, those whose job it had hitherto been only to produce, but not to consume the fruits of their labour. Tsarist Russia had produced great art and music, great writers and poets, great buildings – but all this glitter had rested on the backs of one of the most severely exploited and backward masses of peasants in the world. On the other hand, the great heights that the Soviet Union achieved on the literary and artistic fronts, on all fronts of science, in sports and physical culture, and so on, were the product of a highly

educated and cultured people as a whole. The son or daughter of a worker could and did become a scientist or a professor or a general – not as an exception, but as a matter of course. This is what so impressed countless visitors to the Soviet Union. Tagore was particularly struck, as can be seen from his reference above to the "Turcomans of distant Asia", by the fact that this inclusiveness was extended to all the people in the different republics of the Soviet Union. The erstwhile tsarist regime had been, in the well-known phrase, "a prison-house of nations" in which the people of the far-flung regions had been kept at an abysmally low level by the chauvinist Russian rulers.

Just as it redefined the concept of progress and development, the October Revolution also redefined the concept of democracy. Whereas in the capitalist democracies the propertyless sections who were the majority were having to struggle to just get the right to vote from the grudging hands of the upper classes. In the Soviet Union the common people gave themselves voting privileges as a matter of course. Most revolutionary of all, women had equal political rights with men at a time when women in few other countries had the right to vote. But this was not all. The definition of democracy was substantially expanded to go beyond voting for this or that individual or party. From the soviets to organisations of people at various levels, enabling mechanisms were put in place that made active participation of all the people in public life a reality, as natural to them as breathing. The Westminster system of representative democracy on the other hand, even after the introduction of uni-

versal franchise, had always kept the people away from the actual exercise of power. The Western liberal notions of democracy, with a "talk-shop" Parliament and a narrowly circumscribed set of civil liberties that always worked in favour of those with wealth and property and against the poor and deprived sections of the populace – this could not begin to compare with the self-conscious decisions taken by an aroused, armed, organised and informed people for their own welfare and their own progress. The October Revolution exposed the hypocrisy of the capitalist democracies as democracy for some and not for others.

The great Afro-American singer, Paul Robeson, who spent many months in Russia, had this to say about the Soviet Union in 1935: "I was not prepared for the happiness I see on every face in Moscow. I was aware that there was no starvation here, but I was not prepared for the bounding life; the feeling of safety and abundance and freedom that I find here, wherever I turn." Robeson contrasted the "endless friendliness" he faced from all quarters in Russia with the racist discrimination faced by those of his race in the United States. For his heartfelt appreciation of what he found in the Soviet Union, Robeson – arguably the greatest voice that America has produced – had to pay heavily, for he was virtually hounded out of the United States. The great American "democracy" could not stomach the comments of this son of a former slave about a society where millions of former serfs had achieved their freedom.

International relations was another sphere that was transformed by the October Revolution. For the

better part of a century, the map of the globe had for the most part featured a few powerful states with their vast networks of colonies, with only a few scattered countries struggling to maintain their precarious independence in between. International law, as it then prevailed, was little more than a cover for the iniquitous exploitation of hundreds of millions of people by a handful of marauding states, and a means to sort out contradictions among these states themselves. Justice, equality, the sovereignty of nations and people – these concepts were applied only selectively and arbitrarily to suit the interests of the most powerful states. In this one-sided world, the emergence of a strong and dynamic state of the workers and peasants was a bolt from the blue. One of the first acts of revolutionary Russia, for example, was to unilaterally renounce all the concessions and privileges that the tsarist regime had wrested along with other imperialist powers from a weakened China. This single act, which has come down in history as the Karakhan Declaration, had a profound impact not only on the Chinese people, smarting from the humiliation and abuse heaped on them by imperialist powers for the preceding three-quarters of a century, but also on the people of other colonial and dependent countries.

Fighters for India's freedom from colonial subjugation, it can never be forgotten, found ready support from the Soviet Union. From San Francisco, Berlin, London, and Kabul, exiled Indian patriots flocked to the Soviet Union. They not only found a safe haven there, but also concrete assistance for their plans to liberate India. In the midst of his many pre-occupations in a country struggling

to rebuild itself and besieged from all sides, Vladimir Lenin found the time to talk with and encourage some of the Indians in Moscow at that time. With the founding of the Comintern, this support was systematised and deepened, and the emphasis was rightly laid on strengthening the communist party within India and its links with other anti-colonial sections as the means by which India could liberate herself from British rule. Few things about the October Revolution aroused the wrath of the big imperialist and colonial powers of the time more than this, its profoundly internationalist character, this confronting of the global axis of capital with an international alliance of the world's toilers and oppressed people which had become immeasurably strengthened by the existence of a powerful country where the working class and peasantry ruled.

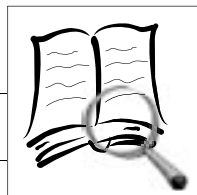
There have always been those who have been romantically taken by the idea of the October Revolution as a heroic mass uprising of the hitherto downtrodden masses, but who are uncomfortable with the fact of it having been led by the Communist Party. On the other hand, there is the view, still widely propagated in imperialist circles, that this was no people's revolution but only a putsch, a coup carried out by means of a 'Bolshevik conspiracy'. Both are distortions of the truth. The October Revolution was both a revolution of the masses in their millions, and it was led by a party with a definite political programme based on its Marxist-Leninist ideology. The October Revolution was no spontaneous outburst, but was the coming to fruition of a movement which had been carefully and patiently prepared and nurtured over many years by an organised political force consisting of thousands

of dedicated revolutionaries. Were it not for this leadership, it is most unlikely that the revolution, even had it broken out when it did, would have been able to vanquish its powerful enemies, and in such a short time achieve the all-sided transformation that astounded both its admirers and its opponents.

The nature of the October Revolution, however, was such that the state and society that it gave birth to were always at war: with the capitalist-imperialist world surrounding it, with the remnants of the defeated exploiting classes within, with the elements lurking within the new society that were against the socialist transformations. Eventually, after overcoming all the challenges of foreign intervention and civil war, of the tremendous struggle to lift the country out of poverty and backwardness, and of the horrors of the fascist invasion, the party and state within the Soviet Union succumbed to these forces. This led as we know, after a degenerative process of several decades, to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The historical process set in motion by the October Revolution thus met with a major setback in the country where it took place. But this is only one part of the picture. As an abiding challenge to the system of capitalism and imperialism; as the most concrete expression ever seen of the rule of the labouring classes and of the alternative to a society based on private profit and the exploitation of the working people; and as the striving to realise the full potential of each and every human being irrespective of his or her background or abilities – the legacy of the October Revolution

*Continued on pg 29*



## Book Review

# Cultural Foundations of Mathematics

**It has been common understanding that mathematical proof based on deduction is universal and is the ultimate proof and also that mathematical truths are eternal universal truths. C K Raju argues that this is a narrow European view of mathematics and the Indian view was very different and empirical. Thus he has raised the important issue of cultural foundation of mathematics. We present here a summary of his startling new book.**

British scholars have known since 1832 that traditional Indian mathematicians had developed a way to handle infinite series, a key component of the calculus. However, Western historians have denied that this amounted to the calculus proper, and many aspects of this fascinating Indian contribution to science have remained unclear for the last 175 years.

In this book, Raju asks four questions that have not been asked before. (1) How were infinite series useful to Indian society? (2) Did the Indian infinite series amount to the calculus? (3) Was this Indian mathematics transmitted to Europe before Newton and Leibniz? (4) Does the traditional Indian approach to mathematics have any practical applications today? Raju's answers are as follows:

1) The main source of wealth in India is agriculture which depends on the monsoons. The monsoons are "erratic", so a good calendar is indispensable to Indian agriculture. The traditional Indian calendar identifies the months of Sawan and Bhadon as the rainy season, unlike the

common Gregorian calendar which has no rainy season. Traditional Indian festivals like Rakhi and Holi do not occur on "fixed" days of the Gregorian calendar (such as 25 December or 15 August), and are related to agriculture. Constructing this specialised Indian calendar required complex planetary models. Calibrating this calendar across the length and breadth of India required precise knowledge of the size of the earth, and of ways of determining latitude and longitude of any place and all this required precise trigonometric values. (This knowledge was useful also for navigation and overseas trade with Alexandria, Arabs, Africa, and China was also a key source of wealth in India.) The required trigonometric values were developed in India since the Surya Siddhanta (3rd c.) and Aryabhata (5th c.). Over the next thousand years these trigonometric values were gradually made more precise, and that led to the development of the Indian infinite series. Thus, Raju concludes that the social utility for agriculture and navigation drove the development of the Indian infinite series.

2) Western scholars have dubbed the Indian infinite series as "pre-calculus", claiming that the calculus proper emerged with the "fundamental theorem of calculus" which was absent in India. Raju responds to this criticism in various ways. (a) First, he questions the premise that mathematics means theorem-proving rather than calculation. This requires a re-examination of all Western history and philosophy. Raju argues that "Euclid" is a historical concoction, and that the Elements, attributed to "Euclid", is actually a Neo-Platonic religious book. It was radically reinterpreted by Christian rational theologians after the 12th c. CE, to support their agenda of converting Arabs, during the Crusades. To this end they declared reason (and mathematics) to be universal. However, since Buddhists and Jains have used a different logic from that used in mathematical proof today, this notion of proof can never be universal. Different principles of proof or pramana were used in Indian tradition, where mathematics is not singled out as requiring a special sort of proof. Raju concludes that

the current Western conception of mathematics as theorem-proving is loaded with religious beliefs unlike calculation which is secular. Hence, the alleged superiority of present-day formal mathematics ultimately rests on religious prejudices which, though deep seated, must be rejected. In particular, Raju reaches the radical conclusion that deduction is more fallible than induction:

(a) conclusion which stands most of Western philosophy on its head. (b) Raju completes the “missing links” in past studies of Indian infinite series to show that there actually was valid *pramana* for the derivation of the Indian infinite series. This *pramana* differed from formal mathematical proof, but it was not inferior for that reason.

(c) Finally, Raju argues that Aryabhata had already developed a neat technique, similar to what is today known as Euler’s method of solving ordinary differential equations, and that this calculation technique is a superior substitute for the fundamental theorem of calculus even today. Thus, Raju concludes that Indians did have the calculus, and that denying this merely amounts to an imposition of Western religious beliefs.

3) Raju points out that information often flows towards the military aggressor. Examples are (a) Alexander’s loot of books, (b) Hulegu and the Samarkand observatory, (c) the Latin translations of Arabic books at Toledo, during the Crusades, and (d) the British colonialists. This happens because the military aggressor is often in a lower state of development. (Toynbee calls these “barbarian incursions”). Specifically, Raju points to Vasco da Gama’s and Columbus’ ignorance of celestial navigation: Vasco was brought to India from Af-

rica by an Indian navigator whose instrument the befuddled Vasco carried back to Europe to study. Europe then dreamt of wealth through overseas trade, so several European nations instituted huge prizes for a good technique of navigation. In 16th c. Europe, precise trigonometric values were critical to navigation: and the problems of determining latitude, longitude and loxodromes. Catholic missionaries were in Cochin, since 1500, and had started a college for the local Syrian Christians. The Portuguese shared a common patron in the Raja of Cochin with the authors of key Indian texts on the Indian infinite series, such the *Yuktidipika* of Sankara Variyar. Later Jesuits got numerous Indian texts translated and despatched them to Europe on the model followed earlier at Toledo. Jesuits like Matteo Ricci specifically looked for Indian astronomy texts, to assist with the Gregorian calendar reform. Thus, Europeans had ample opportunity and motivation to obtain the relevant Indian mathematical texts. A trail of circumstantial evidence is visible as the contents of these Indian texts start appearing implicitly or explicitly in European astronomical and mathematical works from the mid-16th c: Mercator’s chart, Tycho Brahe’s planetary model, Clavius’ trigonometric tables, Kepler’s planetary orbits, Cavalieri’s indivisibles, Fermat’s challenge problem, Pascal’s quadrature, “Newton’s” sine series.

Why were the Indian texts not acknowledged? To understand this, Raju first points to the Hellenisation of history that took place at Toledo. During the religious fanaticism of the crusades, all secular world knowledge in Arab libraries up to the 11th c. was appropriated to the West by attributing it to the theologically

**During the religious fanaticism of the Crusades, all secular world knowledge in Arab libraries up to the 11th c. was appropriated to the West by attributing it to the theologically correct “Greeks”.**

correct “Greeks”. The Arabs, against whom the crusades were on, were declared to be mere intermediaries who helped to restore this “European inheritance” to Europe. (The arrival of Byzantine Greek texts in the 15th c. further confounded matters.)

This claim of transmission of hypothetical “Greek” knowledge to Arabs and all others, involves double standards of evidence. To expose this, Raju considers, as an example, the *Almagest*. The text dates from post-9th c., but is attributed to a “Claudius Ptolemy” from the 2nd c. However, Raju argues, the *Almagest* is an accretive text which was repeatedly updated with inputs from Indian astronomy and mathematics at both Jundishapur (6th c.) and Baghdad (early 9th c.) where Indian texts on astronomy are known to have been imported and translated into Pahlavi and Arabic. Thus, transmission of trigonometric values took place from Indian texts to the *Almagest*, rather than the other way round as is usually claimed by stock histories today, without any evidence. In support of this claim, Raju contrasts the relative sophistication of the *Almagest* text with the non-textual evidence of the crudeness of the Greek and

Roman calendars, which could not get the length of the year right, despite repeated attempts at calendar reform in the 4th through 6th c. CE. This could hardly have happened if the *Almagest* had then existed in its present form.

This European tradition of suppressing non-Christian sources was continued during the Inquisition, when it was dangerous to acknowledge anything theologically incorrect. For example, a key navigational breakthrough in Europe was Mercator's chart (common "map of the world") which shows loxodromes as straight lines. This required precise trigonometric values and a technique equivalent to the fundamental theorem of calculus. Mercator, however, was arrested by the Inquisition, and his sources remain a mystery to this day. Similarly, Clavius, a high religious official, could hardly be expected to acknowledge his debt to non-Christians for trigonometric values, or the Gregorian calendar reform. This habitual nonacknowledgment of non-Christians led to the proliferation of claims of "independent rediscovery" by Europeans. Raju also points to the papal "Doctrine of Christian discovery", promulgated in that period, according to which only Christians could be "discoverers" - hence it was said that Vasco da Gama "discovered" India or that Columbus "discovered" America, since this "discovery" implied ownership, and the existing inhabitants did not count.

To correct this long-standing racist bias, and given the difficulty of obtaining suppressed documents, Raju hence proposes new standards of evidence to decide transmission. This includes the consideration of opportunity, motivation, and circumstantial evidence, as above. It also includes the common-sense "epistemic

test": when two students turn in identical answer sheets, the one who does not understand what he claims to have authored is the one who has copied. Thus, lack of understanding is proof of transmission. Hence, proof of transmission of the calculus comes from the fact that for centuries it remained half-understood in Europe: given the notorious difficulties with Newton's fluxions, and Leibniz's infinitesimals both of which were eventually abandoned. While Clavius published elaborate trigonometric tables, he did not know the elementary trigonometry needed to use them to determine the size of the earth. (This was then badly needed for navigation, especially since Columbus had underestimated the size of the earth by 40 percent to support his project of reaching East by going West.)

Similarly, there is the issue of "epistemic discontinuity": the Indian infinite series developed gradually over a thousand years; but in Europe they appeared almost overnight. From Cavalieri to Newton it hardly took 50 years, and this whole development started just 50 years after Europe first learnt of decimal arithmetic. Interestingly, in an appendix on the "transmission of the transmission thesis", Raju applies this "epistemic test" to prove the transmission of his own ideas to Europe, in a remarkable case of history repeating itself! Thus Raju concludes that the calculus was transmitted from India to Europe, and that similar processes of transmission of information are going on to this very day.

4) Raju points out applications of traditional Indian mathematics to mathematics education, computers, and frontier areas of physics today.

The European difficulties in understanding arithmetic and the calculus, both imported from India, are

today replayed in the classroom, in "fast forward" mode, and this is what makes it difficult for students to understand mathematics. The solution is to go back to the understanding within which that mathematics originated.

For example, Indians used a flexible rope (= *sulba*) to measure curved lines since the days of the *sulba* sutras. However, exactly measuring curved lines was declared to be "beyond the capacity of the human mind" by Descartes, since Western geometry was based on the straight line. Hence, Galileo left it to his student Cavalieri to articulate the calculus. These conceptual difficulties can be avoided, Raju argues, by switching back to the rope as a superior substitute to the compass box today used in schools.

Raju explains how the Indian understanding of number, in the context of *sunyavada*, is related to the representation of numbers on present-day computers, and why this should be taught in preference to the impractical and formal notion of number taught today in schools.

Raju also explains how to apply this understanding to tackle unsolved problems related to the infinities and infinitesimals that arise in the extensions of the calculus today used in frontier areas of physics, in the theory of shock waves, and the renormalisation problem of quantum field theory.

Thus, in the process of answering these four questions, Raju has challenged the entire Western tradition of mathematics, both its history and its philosophy. Especially interesting is the conclusion that the believed certainty of mathematical proof and the infallibility of deduction are based on religious dogma which is remedied by allowing the empirical in mathemat-

ics as in the alternative philosophy of mathematics Raju proposes. The formal approach to mathematics, Raju argues, is based on the wrong belief that logic is a metaphysical and metamathematical matter on which it is possible to impose a “universal” social consensus. Given the social disagreement over logic, even logic ought to be decided empirically, he maintains.

This alternative philosophy follows realistic sunyavada thinking on representability. (In Buddhist thought, the problem of representability arose because of the denial of the soul, and the consequent problem of representing an “individual” when nothing “essential” stays constant for even two instants.) Raju interprets sunya as the non-representable, “something” which is neglected in a calculation. For example, the number today called  $\pi$  can never be fully specified or distinguished from a potential infinity of other nearby numbers. In any actual calculation, one can only write down its decimal expansion up to a trillion digits, say, beyond which one does not care what

happens. This problem of representability is today made manifest by the finitary thinking of computers, increasingly used for complex mathematical tasks: surprisingly, even integers cannot be “correctly” represented on a computer. This, argues Raju, is not any sort of limitation or “error” of representation, but is in the nature of things. The error, to the contrary, is in the idealistic approach to mathematics based on a wrong belief in the possibility of upertasks (an infinite series of tasks): the mere name  $\pi$  does not represent a unique number any more than the name of a person represents a unique individual. Given the paucity of names, a person’s name is just a practical device by means of which we refer to a whole procession of individuals, from birth to death, who differ from each other so “slightly” that we “don’t care” about the difference. The “slight” difference may vary with the context, and may even be manifest as the difference between a child and the (same) child as an adult. The same thing applies to representations of numbers on a computer (or in any

practical rule-based calculation).

Apart from being very useful for computation, the mere existence of such an alternative philosophy of mathematics poses a challenge to Western thought, which has never conceived of the possibility that mathematics might be ultimately based on physical hypotheses about logic, and that it might be realistic, fallible and less than perfect.

**Summary of : “Cultural Foundations of Mathematics: the Nature of Mathematical Proof and the Transmission of the Calculus from India to Europe in the 16th c. CE (Pearson Longman, 2007). ■**

*Dr C K Raju is a mathematician, historian and philosopher and has made important contribution through many articles and monographs towards combating Eurocentric rendition of the history of Mathematics. He has particularly brought out the impact of theological controversies in Europe on revisionist history of mathematics.*

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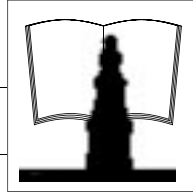
*Continued from pg 25*

still endures. Today in India, crores upon crores of people continue to live in such conditions of backwardness that they are comparable to those endured by the peasants in pre-revolutionary Russia. A colonial justice system, a colonial education system, an army that continues to base itself on colonial traditions, all make a mockery of the struggles our people fought to rid themselves of foreign domination. While Indian capitalist tycoons crow about the successes they are achieving in a ‘globalizing’ world, tens of thousands of self-respecting hardworking Indian peas-

ants are committing suicide because they cannot make ends meet. The people are told that they are sovereign, but they lack the power to change their conditions for the better. In these conditions, more and more sections of our people are looking for an alternative to the existing system, they are coming around to the view that they have to take matters into their own hands, and that they must get organised for this. In these conditions, the legacy of the October Revolution is more relevant than ever before. Profound, all-sided transformation is an urgent

necessity, and it must begin, as it did in Russia 90 years ago, by sorting out the question of political power - who exercises it, how it is exercised, and what is the purpose for which it is exercised. The sorting out of this question is what will lead to the much-needed renewal of India. ■

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# Excerpts from: Minute by the Hon'ble T. B. Macaulay

Dated the 2nd February 1835.

**W**e now come to the gist of the matter. We have a fund to be employed as government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be affected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

What then shall that language be? One-half of the committee maintain that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommend the Arabic and Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be - which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home,

with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.

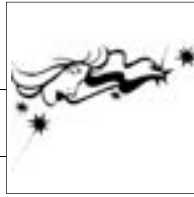
It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to



that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the

*Continued on pg 32*





## Short Story

# The Cemetery Tourist

S. Raghavan

Frank Durand surveyed the glistening blue waters in the swimming pool below from his balcony at the Jag Niwas Lake Palace Hotel. The yellow sandstone walls and the marble floor reflected the bright sun making the waters glisten even more. From his Jag Mandir Darshan suite he could also get an excellent view of the eight life-sized elephants carved out of white marble guarding the Palace. The Lake Pichola and the Aravalli mountains provided a splendid backdrop.

“How soothing and tranquil, how picturesque this place is”, he thought, but quickly shook himself out of the reverie. He had not come here all the way, taking precious time off his busy schedule, to admire the serene beauty of the palace. He had come on a much more somber mission. Frank was one of the “cemetery tourists” who was visiting India, in the 150th anniversary of the Ghadar of 1857, to visit their ancestor’s graves. It was both a personal and business visit. He would hopefully clinch an important deal in a joint venture with the Government of Rajasthan and a Jaipur based Indian business tycoon.

Frank had already investigated the whereabouts of his ancestor, Major Charles Durand’s grave. During the revolt of 1857, the “Indian Sepoy Mutiny” as he knew it, several European families fled from Neemuch and used the island as an asylum, offered to them by Maharana Swaroop Singh. He had read, that in order to protect his colonial guests, the Rana destroyed all the town’s boats

so that the rebels could not reach the island.

When the idea occurred to him that he should visit his ancestor’s grave, Frank thought this may be just inviting trouble. There may be an adverse reaction from the locals and the media. He didn’t mind if it stopped only with that. The minister from the state government with whom he was negotiating a business deal may find it embarrassing to continue his association with him and may even call off the deal.

He read in the newspapers that when a group of Britons, led by Sir Mark Havelock went to Lucknow to visit the grave of Sir Henry Havelock who died in the siege of the Residency, there were vigorous protests from the public and the visitors had to stay holed up in their hotel. Havelock had to sneak in anonymously to visit his ancestor’s grave.

But Frank found that the situation was different here. The Jag Mandir Palace was not converted into a national monument. It was left in the hands of the Sisodia rulers who converted it into a five star hotel. The Taj Group of Hotels who owned the Palace now couldn’t care less about the historical value of the Palace. It particularly catered to visitors from foreign multinationals, providing them with efficient infrastructure and connectivity, while at the same time giving them a glimpse of the splendor of the Rajput rulers. The new exploiters found the Palace a great place to make deals with ministers and businessmen. They

didn’t have to do this surreptitiously like Sir Mark Havelock. The new Indian owner of the hotel didn’t have to break boats to prevent protestors from reaching the palace either.

“How convenient”, thought Frank. “In any case there is no need for me to tell everyone about my mission. Let me quietly visit the grave and get on with the other work”, he decided.

The next day, as Frank placed a bouquet of flowers on the grave of his ancestor Major Charles Durand, he recalled the circumstances that led to the desperate flight of the Briton. The garrison led by Charles consisted of the 72nd Regiment and one wing of the 1st Bengal Cavalry. On the 3rd of June 1857 all hell broke loose. The troops revolted and the officers and their families desperately dashed to Udaipur, 120 km away, to save their lives. But for the Rana of Mewar’s “chivalry” the officers would have met their end. Major Charles died within a few days of reaching Udaipur, not in combat but out of sheer exhaustion.

The Minister comforted Frank when they met at dinner at the Jarokha restaurant which had entertained Queen Elizabeth, the Shah of Iran and the King of Nepal. “I would have organised a proper celebration for your visit to your ancestor’s grave, but it is better to be prudent”, the Minister quipped. “Many business families, Ministers and even Chief Ministers agree, like me, that the British brought civilisation and progress to India. But

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## Short Story

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for the British, many of us would not have been what we are today", he said with genuine conviction. "At the same time we have to be careful about people's sentiments. You must understand, their votes are important for us". Frank nodded sympathetically.

It was well into the night when the transactions were completed for the joint venture and payments sorted out. The Minister took leave of Frank. "I would have liked to spend some more time here, but I have an early morning appointment. My colleague in Madhya Pradesh has in-

vited me to make a speech about the 1857 rebellion in Neemuch tomorrow". He then apologetically added, "we have to do our duty also, you see. But, the deal will be signed by the Chief Minister first thing tomorrow afternoon". ■

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*Continued from pg 30*

Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information, which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language, is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

How then stands the case? The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa,

the other in Australia, - communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

The fact that the Hindoo law is to be learned chiefly from Sanscrit books, and the Mahometan law from Arabic books, has been much insisted on, but seems not to bear at all on the question. We are commanded by Parliament to ascertain and digest the laws of India. The assistance of a Law Commission has been given to us for that purpose. As soon as the Code is promulgated the Shastras and the Hedaya will be useless to a munsif or a Sadr Ameen. I hope and trust that, before the boys who are now entering at the Mudrassa and the Sanscrit College have completed their studies, this great work will be finished. It would be manifestly absurd to educate the rising generation with a view to a state of things, which we mean to alter before they reach manhood.

In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views

I am opposed. I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

**Thomas Babington  
Macaulay**  
*2nd February 1835.*

I give my entire concurrence to the sentiments expressed in this Minute.

**William Cavendish  
Bentinck** ■

*Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781-1839). Edited by H. Sharp. Reprint: Delhi: National Archives of India, 1965, 107-117.*



# Kunwar Singh

## *A lullaby about the lion of Jagdishpur*

(Continued from back cover)

*Oh Babua the Bhojpuris had thrown even  
their lathis aside*

*Oh Babua that day our grandpa took up his  
sword*

*Oh Babua he was eighty years old*

*Oh Babua his head shook as he moved*

*Oh Babua his hair was white like the heron,*

*Oh Babua all his thirty two teeth he had  
lost*

*Oh Babua that day our grandpa took up his  
sword*

*(Courtesy: 1857 in folk songs—P C Joshi)*

# Kunwar Singh

## *A lullaby about the lion of Jagdishpur*

*Oh Babua that day our grandpa took up his sword*

*Oh Babua to keep safe our pride and our plenty*

*Our religion and our cows*

*Oh Babua to keep safe our widows and their honour*

*And to protect our mothers and sisters from disgrace*

*Oh Babua to defend the fair name of our fathers and grandfathers*

*Oh Babua the edge of calamity was upon us*

*Oh Babua that day our grandpa took up his sword*

*Oh Babua the Marathas laid down their lives*

*And the Sikhs had fought till they died*

*Oh Babua the sons of the Peshwas were turned into slaves*

*Oh Babua the emperor of Delhi he too a pauper became*

*And we begged and begged and received no alms*

*Oh Babua that day our grandpa took up his sword*

*Oh Babua useless when our cannon became*

*And scorpions had laid eggs in them*

*Oh Babua the barrels of our guns had rested*

*Oh Babua we had foolishly made*

*Sickles out of the steel of our swords*

(Continued inside back cover)